

Today, in the Office of the President, Evelin Ilves presented the Nordea Bank sponsored 1,000 euro Young Athlete's Prizes to biathlete Meril Beilmann, tennis player Henri Nael and track and field athlete Martin Paakspuu. The team prize of 3,200 euros went to the Estonian junior épée team consisting of Veronika Zuikova, Gaia-Marianna Siim, Anu Hark and Katrina Lehis.

The Young Athlete's Prize has been awarded for the past ten years. The team prize was awarded for the second time. According to Evelin Ilves, it has become more and more difficult to make the choice, as the applicants all excel in both sports and studies. The wife of the President emphasised that we must definitely not pit study results against sports and prefer one to another. "Today's top Estonian athletes think and act in the same way; you have wonderful role models," told Evelin Ilves.

"We have visited the schools of the prize winners several times in the company of top athletes such as Gerd Kanter, Erki Nool, Nikolai Novosjolov and Toomas Tõniste to recognise both the school's acknowledged athlete and the school, and we will definitely keep up this good tradition," added Evelin Ilves.

According to Andreas Laan, the CEO of Nordea Bank, which sponsors the Young Athlete's Prize, the bank is pleased to acknowledge dedicated young athletes for the sixth year in a row. "We do believe that real athletes see their chosen field as a marathon in which consistent self-development and working on one's strengths result in success," told Andreas Laane.

Meril Beilmann, who spoke on behalf of the athletes, stated that the prize is hugely inspiring as well as being a huge responsibility. "I do believe that this award is also recognition of both the trainers and parents who have supported us with love," Beilmann added.

The Young Athlete's Prize laureates in 2014 are:

Biathlete **Meril Beilmann** (born 1995) is a graduate student of the non-stationary studies of mathematics and English at Gustav Adolf Gymnasium. Though originally a cross-country skier for three years, Meril has been a biathlete at Nõmme Sports Club since 2009 and is coached by Aita and Tõnu Pääsuke. She has won medals in the Estonian championships in both fields.

In 2014, she won a bronze medal in the U21 mixed relay race in the Biathlon European Championships and claimed sixth place in the 7.5 km sprint at the Junior World championships in the United States of America. In 2013, she won fourth place in the U19 relay race at the Junior World Championships. Meril will use the prize money of 1,000 euros to cover some of her training camp expenses and to buy equipment.

Tennis player **Henri Nael** (born 1999) studies in the 8th class at Pärnu Joint Gymnasium and has achieved excellent grades. Henri began his tennis practice at Pärnu Kalev Tennis Club in 2006 with Uno Koort as coach; today, he is coached by Mait Künnap. He has won five medals in the Estonian Youth Tennis Championship and has won the Youth Championship of Pärnu Town on several occasions. At the age of 12, he became the youngest champion of Pärnu in the U18 age category. Henri finished first in his age group last year. Henri will use the prize money of 1,000 euros to acquire high-tech sports shoes.

Track and field athlete **Martin Paakspuu** (born 1996) has practiced sports since elementary school; today, he studies in the 11th class at Võru Kreutzwald Gymnasium and excels in his studies. He competes for Lõunalõvi (the Southern Lion) Club of the Võru Track and Field Club, is coached by Heini Allikvee and was the most successful track and field athlete last year with nine medals. He is a multiple Estonian junior champion in the A, B and junior classes, and has been the best in the Baltic youth competitions in the hurdles, pole vault and, his main event, all-round. In 2011, Martin also set a new Estonian indoor result in the boys' U15 60 m hurdles. The pole vault is one of the strongest of Marti's events, and he has won the title of Võrumaa's best track and field athlete for the past two years. In 2013, Martin competed in Donetsk at the IAAF Junior World Championship, where he scored 5,733 points and 18th place in the octathlon. Martin was chosen as the best track and field athlete in A class by the Estonian Athletic Association and the Võru town athlete of the year; he has also been named the best track and field athlete of Võru county for three years in a row. Martin will use the prize money of 1,000 euros to cover some training and competition costs and to acquire equipment.

This year, the team prize went to the **Estonian junior épée team**, consisting of **Veronika Zuikova**, **Gaia-Marianna Siim**

,
Anu Hark
and

Katrina Lehis

, which was this year crowned the Junior World Champion. The épée team won a silver medal in 2013 at the European Junior Championship in Fencing in Budapest. The team consists of athletes born in 1993 and 1994, and they have been competing together for the past four years. Siim and Hark are accomplished students at Tallinn University of Technology, while Zuikova

graduated from Mustamäe Humanitarian Gymnasium with a gold medal and now studies international business in Helsinki. Lehis will graduate from Läänemaa Joint Gymnasium this year and is coached by Helen Nelis-Naukas. The team was coached by Juhan Salm at the European championship, who is also the coach of Gaia-Marianna Siim. Tiit Räni coaches Anu Hark and Viktor Zuikov coaches Veronika Zuikova. The team will use the prize money of 3,200 euros to cover their training and competition costs.

This year, 50 applications were received, 8 of which were for the team prize.

For additional information about the prize, please see: <http://bit.ly/1uhOfTT>

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